

A Mother in Mannville by Marjorie Rawlings

The orphanage (অনাথ আশ্রম) is high in the Carolina Mountains. Sometimes in winter the snowdrifts (তুষার প্রবাহ) are so deep that the institution is cut off from the village below, from all the world. Fog hides the mountain peaks (শৃঙ্গ), the snow swirls (ঘূর্ণাবর্তে পাক খাওয়া) down the valleys (উপত্যকা), and a wind blows so bitterly (নির্মম) that the orphanage boys who take the milk twice daily to the baby cottage (কুটির/কুঁড়েঘর) reach the door with fingers stiff (অনমনীয় আঙ্গুল) in an agony (নিদারুণ যন্ত্রণা) of numbness (অসাড়তা).

"Or when we carry trays (ট্রে) from the cookhouse for the ones that are sick," Jerry said, "we get our faces frostbit (তুষারস্পর্শে দেহের অসাড়তা), because we can't put our hands over them. I have gloves (গ্লাভস)," he added. "Some of the boys don't have any."

He liked the late spring (বসন্ত পরবর্তী), he said. The rhododendron (একজাতীয় চিরসবুজ গুল্ম) was in bloom (প্রস্ফুটন/ কুঁড়ি), a carpet (গালিচা) of color, across the mountainsides (পর্বতপার্শ্ব), soft as the May winds that stirred (আলোড়িত) the hemlocks (বিষলতাবিশেষ). He called it laurel (গুল্মবিশেষ/ চিকন পত্র যুক্ত একজাতীয় চিরহরিত গুল্ম, যার পাতার মুকুট প্রাচীন গ্রীস ও রোমে সম্মান বা বিজয়ের বা কাব্যকৃতির প্রতীকরূপে ব্যবহৃত হত).

"It's pretty (বেশ মনোরম) when the laurel blooms (পুষ্পিত হওয়া)," he said. "Some of it's pink and some of it's white."

I was there in the autumn (শরৎ). I wanted quiet (শান্ত), isolation (বিচ্ছিন্নতা), to do some troublesome (বিরক্তিজনক) writing. I wanted mountain air to blow out the malaria (ম্যালেরিয়া) from too long a time in the subtropics (উপ ক্রান্তীয়). I was homesick (স্বদেশে ফেরার জন্য কাতর), too, for the flaming (অত্যন্ত গরম) of maples (বৃক্ষবিশেষ) in October, and for corn (ভূট্টা) shocks and pumpkins (কুমড়ো) and black-walnut (কালো আখরোট) trees and the lift (উত্তোলন করা) of hills (পাহাড়). I found them all, living in a cabin that belonged (অধিবাসী হইয়া থাকা) to the orphanage, half a mile beyond (দূরে) the orphanage farm. When I took the cabin, I asked for a boy or man to come and chop wood (কাঠ কুচি কুচি করে কাটা) for the fireplace (অগ্নিকুণ্ড). The first few days were warm, I found what wood I needed about the cabin, no one came, and I forgot the order.

I looked up from my typewriter (মুদ্রলিখ) one late afternoon, a little startled (সচকিত). A boy stood at the door, and my pointer (আদেশ) dog, my companion (সহচর), was at his side and had not barked (ঘেউ-ঘেউ করা) to warn (সতর্ক করা) me. The boy was probably twelve years old, but undersized (বেঁটে). He wore (পরিধান করা) overalls (কাজের পোষাক) and a torn (হেঁড়া) shirt, and was barefooted (নগ্নপদ).

He said, "I can chop (কাটা) some wood today."

I said, "But I have a boy coming from the orphanage."

"I'm the boy."

"You? But you're small."

"Size don't matter, chopping wood," he said. "Some of the big boys don't chop good. I've been chopping wood at the orphanage a long time."

I visualized (ঠাহর করা) mangled (কর্তন করা) and inadequate (অপর্যাপ্ত) branches (বৃক্ষশাখা) for my fires. I was well into my work and not inclined (অনুরক্ত/ স্নেহবান) to conversation. I was a little blunt (স্পষ্টবাদী).

"Very well. There's the ax. Go ahead and see what you can do."

I went back to work, closing the door. At first the sound of the boy dragging (টেনে) brush annoyed (বিরক্ত) me. Then he began to chop. The blows were rhythmic (ছন্দোময়) and steady, and shortly I had forgotten him, the sound no more of an interruption (বাধা) than a consistent (ধারাবাহিক বৃষ্টি) rain. I suppose (অনুমান করা) an hour and a half passed, for when I stopped and stretched (টানা), and heard the boy's steps on the cabin stoop (নত হতয়া), the sun was dropping behind the farthest (সুদূরতম) mountain, and the valleys (উপত্যকার) were purple (রক্তবর্ণ) with something deeper than the asters (তারারফুল).

The boy said, "I have to go to supper now. I can come again tomorrow evening."

I said, "I'll pay you now for what you've done," thinking I should probably have to insist (জোর করা) on an older boy. "Ten cents an hour?"

"Anything is all right."

We went together back of the cabin. An astonishing (বিস্ময়কর) amount of solid (কঠিন) wood had been cut. There were cherry (জামজাতীয় ফলবিশেষ) logs (গুঁড়ি) and heavy roots of rhododendron (একজাতীয় চিরসবুজ গুল্ম), and blocks (গুঁড়ি) from the waste pine (নষ্ট পাইন) and oak (ওক গাছ) left from the building of the cabin.

"But you've done as much as a man," I said, "This is a splendid pile (চমকপ্রদ স্তুপ)."

I looked at him, actually, for the first time. His hair was the color of the corn shocks and his eyes, very direct, were like the mountain sky when rain is pending – gray (ধূসর), with a shadowing (ছায়াকরণ) of that miraculous (বিস্ময়কর) blue. As I spoke, a light came over him, as though the setting sun had touched him with the same suffused (আবৃত করা) glory (বিজয়গৌরব) with which it touched the mountains, I gave him a quarter (সিকি/ একচতুর্থাংশ).

"You may come tomorrow," I said, "and thank you very much."

He looked at me, and at the coin, and seemed (বোধ হতয়া) to want to speak, but could not, and turned away.

"I'll split (ফাঁড়িয়া ফেলা) kindling (আগুন জ্বালবার উপকরণ) tomorrow," he said over his thin ragged (জীর্ণ) shoulder. "You'll need kindling and medium wood and logs and backlogs (জমা কাজ)."

At daylight I was half wakened (জাগরিত) by the sound of chopping. Again it was so even in texture (আবির্ভাব) that I went back to sleep. When I left my bed in the cool morning, the boy had come and gone, and a stack (খড়) of kindling was neat (ঝরঝরে) against the cabin wall. He came again after school in the afternoon and worked until time to return to the orphanage. His name was Jerry; he was twelve years old, and he had been at the orphanage since he was four. I could picture him at four, with the same grave (সমাধি/ মারাত্মক) gray-blue (ধূসর নীল) eyes and the same –independence? No, the word that comes to me is "integrity (সততা)."

The word means something very special to me, and the quality for which I use it is a rare one. My father had it – there is another of whom I am almost sure – but almost no man of my acquaintance (জানাতো) possesses (ভোগদখল করা) it with the clarity (স্বচ্ছতা), the purity, the simplicity (ছলকলাহীনতা) of a mountain stream. But the boy Jerry had it. It is bedded (স্তরীভূত করা) on courage (বীরত্ব), but it is more than brave (সাহসী). It is honest, but it is more than honesty. The ax handle broke one day. Jerry said the woodshop at the orphanage would repair it. I brought money to pay for the job and he refused it.

“I’ll pay for it,” he said. “I broke it. I brought the ax down careless.”

“But no one hits accurately every time,” I told him. “The fault was in the wood of the handle. I’ll see the man from whom I bought it.”

It was only then that he would take the money. He was standing back of his own carelessness. He was a free-will (ইচ্ছাস্বাতন্ত্র্য) agent and he chose to do careful work, and if he failed, he took the responsibility without subterfuge (এড়ানর কৌশল).

And he did for me the unnecessary thing, the gracious (ক্ষমাপূর্ণ) thing that we find done only by the great of heart. Things no training can teach, for they are done on the instant, with no predicted experience (পূর্ব+অভিজ্ঞতা). He found a cubbyhole (আরামপ্রদ স্থান) beside the fireplace that I had not noticed. There, of his own accord, he put kindling (আগুন জ্বালিবার উপকরণ) and “medium” wood, so that I might always have dry fire material ready in case of sudden wet (আর্দ্র) weather. A stone was loose (আলগা) in the rough (অসমতল) walk to the cabin. He dug (খোঁড়া) a deeper hole and steadied (কারো বা কোনো জিনিসের পরিবর্তে বদলে) it, although he came, himself, by a short cut over the bank. I found that when I tried to return his thoughtfulness (মনোযোগদান) with such things as candy (মিছরি) and apples, he was wordless (অব্যক্ত). “Thank you” was, perhaps (সম্ভবত), an expression for which he had had no use, for his courtesy was instinctive (সহজাত). He only looked at the gift and at me, and a curtain (অভিনয়শেষ) lifted (উদ্ধৃত), so that I saw deep into the clear well of his eyes, and gratitude (কৃতজ্ঞতা) was there, and affection, soft over the firm (দৃঢ়+উপর+নরম) granite (দৃঢ়তা) of his character.

He made simple excuses (অজুহাত) to come and sit with me. I could no more have turned him away than if he had been physically hungry. I suggested once that the best time for us to visit was just before supper (নৈশভোজ), when I left off my writing. After that, he waited always until my typewriter had been some time quiet. One day I worked until nearly dark. I went outside the cabin, having forgotten him. I saw him going up over the hill in the twilight (গোধূলি) toward the orphanage. When I sat down on my stoop (ঝোঁকান), a place was warm from his body where he had been sitting.

He became intimate (ঘনিষ্ঠ), of course, with my pointer, Pat (ইশারা+কথা). There is a strange communion (আলাপন) between a boy and a dog. Perhaps they possess (মনকে অধিকার করা) the same singleness (একাকীত্ব) of spirit (আত্মা), the same kind of wisdom (বিজ্ঞতা). It is difficult to explain, but it exists (বিদ্যমান). When I went across the state for a weekend, I left the dog in Jerry’s charge

(তত্ত্বাবধান). I gave him the dog whistle and the key to the cabin, and left sufficient food. He was to come two or three times a day and let out (মুক্ত করিয়া দেওয়া) the dog, and feed and exercise him. I should return Sunday night, and Jerry would take out the dog for the last time Sunday afternoon and then leave the key under an agreed (অনুমোদিত) hiding place.

My return was belated (বিলম্বিত) and fog filled the mountain passes so treacherously (বিশ্বাসঘাতকতাপূর্বক) that I dared not drive at night. The fog held the next morning, and it was Monday noon before I reached the cabin. The dog had been fed and cared for that morning. Jerry came early in the afternoon, anxious.

"The superintendent (নিয়ন্ত্রক) said nobody would drive in the fog," he said. "I came just before bedtime last night and you hadn't come. So I brought Pat (মানানসই) some of my breakfast this morning. I wouldn't have let anything happen to him."

"I was sure of that. I didn't worry."

"When I heard about the fog, I thought you'd know."

He was needed for work at the orphanage and he had to return at once. I gave him a dollar in payment, and he looked at it and went away. But that night he came in the darkness and knocked at the door.

"Come in, Jerry," I said, "if you're allowed to be away this late."

"I told maybe a story," he said. "I told them I thought you would want to see me."

"That's true," I assured him, and I saw his relief (মুক্তি). "I want to hear about how you managed with the dog."

He sat by the fire with me, with no other light, and told me of their two days together. The dog lay close to him, and found a comfort there that I did not have for him. And it seemed (বোধ হওয়া) to me that being with my dog, and caring for him, had brought the boy and me, too, together, so that he felt that he belonged (অধিকারভুক্ত হওয়া) to me as well as to the animal.

"He stayed right with me," he told me, "except when he ran in the laurel (গুল্মবিশেষ/ চিকন পত্র যুক্ত একজাতীয় চিরহরিত গুল্ম, যার পাতার মুকুট প্রাচীন গ্রীস ও রোমে সম্মান বা বিজয়ের বা কাব্যকৃতির প্রতীকরূপে ব্যবহৃত হত). He likes the laurel. I took him up over the hill and we both ran fast. There was a place where the grass was high and I lay down in it and hid (লুকিয়েছেন). I could hear Pat (কথা) hunting for me. He found my trail and he barked. When he found me, he acted crazy, and he ran around and around me, in circles."

We watched the flames (অগ্নিশিখা).

"That's an apple log (কাটা গাছের গুঁড়ি)," he said. "It burns the prettiest (সুন্দর) of any wood."

We were very close.

He was suddenly impelled (তাড়িত) to speak of things he had not spoken of before, nor had I cared to ask him.

"You look a little bit like my mother," he said "Especially in the dark, by the fire."

"But you were only four, Jerry, when you came here. You have remembered how she looked, all these years?"

"My mother lives in Mannville," he said.

For a moment, finding that he had a mother shocked me as greatly as anything in my life has ever done, and I did not know why it disturbed me. Then I understood my distress (মর্মপীড়া). I was filled with a passionate (ক্ৰোধশীল) resentment (বিরক্তিভাব) that any woman should go away and leave her son. A fresh anger (ক্ৰোধ) added itself. A son like this one – The orphanage was a wholesome (স্বাস্থ্যকর) place, the executives (কর্তা) were kind, good people, the food was more than adequate, the boys were healthy, a ragged shirt was no hardship (অসচ্ছলতা), nor the doing of clean labor. Granted (মঞ্জুর), perhaps, that the boy felt no lack, what blood fed (প্রতিপালিত) the bowels (গর্ভ) of a woman who did not yearn (হটফট করা) over this child's lean (অস্থিসার) body that had come in parturition (প্রসব) out of her own? At four he would have looked the same as now. Nothing, I thought, nothing in life could change those eyes. His quality must be apparent (আপাত) to an idiot (গাধা), a fool. I burned (যন্ত্রণা দেওয়া) with questions I could not ask. In any case, I was afraid, there would be pain.

"Have you seen her, Jerry – lately?"

"I see her every summer. She sends for me."

I wanted to cry out, "Why are you not with her? How can she let you go away again?"

He said, "She comes up here from Mannville whenever she can. She doesn't have a job now."

His face shone (উজ্জ্বল) in the firelight.

"She wanted to give me a puppy (কুকুরছানা), but they can't let any one boy keep a puppy. You remember the suit (নালিশ) I had on last Sunday?" He was plainly proud. "She sent me that for Christmas. The Christmas before that" – he drew (নিঃসারিত করা) a long breath, savoring (উপলব্ধি করা) the memory – "she sent me a pair of skates (পাদুকা)."

"Roller skates?"

My mind was busy, making pictures of her, trying to understand her. She had not, then, entirely (সম্পূর্ণরূপে) deserted (নির্জন) or forgotten him. But why, then – I thought, "I must not condemn (নিন্দা) her without knowing."

"Roller skates. I let the other boys use them. They're always borrowing (ধারকরা কোনোকিছু) them. But they're careful of them."

What circumstances other than poverty -

"I'm going to take the dollar you gave me for taking care of Pat (কথা)," he said, "and buy her a pair of gloves (হাতমোজা)."

I could only say, "That will be nice. Do you know her size?"

"I think its 8 ½?" he said.

He looked at my hands.

"Do you wear 8 ½? He asked.

"No. I wear a smaller size, a 6."

"Oh! Then I guess her hands are bigger than yours."

I hated her. Poverty or no, there was other food than bread, and the soul could starve (ক্ষুধায় মারা) as quickly as the body. He was taking his dollar to buy gloves for her big stupid hands, and she lived away from him, in Manville, and contented (সন্তুষ্ট) herself with sending him skates (স্কেইট ভর দিয়া চলা).

"She likes white gloves," he said. "Do you think I can get them for a dollar?"

"I think so," I said.

I decided that I should not leave the mountains without seeing her and knowing for myself why she had done this thing.

The human mind scatters (ছড়িয়ে) its interests as thought made of thistle-down (কাঁটাগাছ থেকে নিচে), and every wind stirs (চলাচল) and moves it. I finished my work. It did not please me, and I gave my thoughts to another field. I should need some Mexican material.

I made arrangements (ব্যবস্থা) to close (কাছাকাছি) my Florida place. Mexico immediately, and doing the writing there, if conditions were favorable. Then, Alaska with my brother. After that, heaven (স্বর্গ) knew what or where.

I did not take time to go to Mannville to see Jerry's mother, nor even to talk with the orphanage officials about her. I was a trifle (তুচ্ছ বিষয়) abstracted (চিন্তামগ্ন) about the boy, because of my work and plans. And after my first fury (ক্ষিপ্ততা) at her – we did not speak of her again – his having a mother, any sort at all, not far away, in Mannville, relieved (অব্যাহতি) me of the ache (বেদনা) I had had about him. He did not question the anomalous (ব্যতিক্রমী) relation. He was not lonely. It was none of my concern (চিন্তা).

He came every day and cut my wood and did small helpful favors (সহায়ক+নিতেন) and stayed to talk. The days had become cold, and often I let him come inside the cabin. He would lie on the floor in front of the fire, with one arm across the pointer (ইশারা+জুড়ে), and they would both doze (তন্দ্রা) and wait quietly for me. Other days they ran with a common ecstasy (পরমআনন্দ) through the laurel, and since the asters (তারাপুল) were now gone, he brought me back vermilion (টকটকে লাল) maple (বৃক্ষবিশেষ) leaves, and chestnut (বাদাম) boughs (গাছের ডাল) dripping (ক্ষরণ) with imperial (সার্বভৌম) yellow I was ready to go.

I said to him, "You have been my good friend, Jerry. I shall often think of you and miss you. Pay will miss you too. I am leaving tomorrow."

He did not answer. When he went away, I remember that a new moon hung (স্তব্ধ) over the mountains, and I watched him go in silence up the hill. I expected him the next day, but he did not come. The details of packing my personal belongings, loading my car, arranging the bed over the seat, where the dog would ride, occupied (অধিষ্ঠিত) me until late in the day. I closed the cabin and started the car, noticing that the sun was in the west and I should do well to be out of the mountains by nightfall (দিনশেষ). I stopped by the orphanage and left the cabin key and money for my light bill with Miss Clark.

"And will you call Jerry for me to say good-by to him?"

"I don't know where he is," she said. "I'm afraid he's not well. He didn't eat his dinner this noon. One of the other boys saw him going over the hill into the laurel. He was supposed (অনুমিত) to fire the boiler (ফোটার পাত্র) this afternoon. It's not like him; he's unusually reliable (নির্ভরযোগ্য)."

I was almost relieved (অব্যাহতি), for I knew I should never see him again, and it would be easier not to say good-bye to him.

I said, "I wanted to talk with you about his mother – why he's here – but I'm in more of a hurry than I expected to be. It's out of the question for me to see her now too. But here's some money I'd like to leave with you to buy things for him at Christmas and on his birthday. It will be better than for me to try to send him things. I could so easily duplicate – skates, for instance (উপলক্ষ)."

She blinked (চোখ টেপা/ পলক ফেলা) her honest spinster's (চিরকুমারী) eyes.

"There's not much use for skates here," she said.

Her stupidity annoyed me.

"What I mean," I said, "is that I don't want to duplicate things his mother sends him. I might have chosen skates if I didn't know she had already given them to him."

She stared at me.

"I don't understand," she said. "He has no mother. He has no skates."

Translated By: Shafik Shaon

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